



Congress of the United States
House of Representatives

Washington, DC 20515

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Secretary Janet Napolitano
Department of Homeland Security
Washington, DC 20528

Secretary Ken Salazar
Department of the Interior
Washington DC 20240

Dear Secretary Napolitano and Secretary Salazar:

In response to confirmed reports that repeated efforts to close the open well head at the Deepwater Horizon disaster site failed, I am writing to urge an immediate review of the current response to this growing environmental and economic disaster off the coast of my state. As the oil slick draws closer to Louisiana's barrier islands, oyster beds, fisheries and shore line, the urgency to which we must act is increasing. We now know that the hope of quick containment will not be realized.

We must do all we can, regardless of short-term cost, to mitigate the economic and environmental impact of this spill. Oil intrusions into these fragile habitats could set our seafood industry back decades. Our vibrant shipping and commerce businesses that depend on our southernmost ports will be slowed, if not stopped, should this spill continue to push toward land.

Accordingly, I believe we must work together considering the following points:

- 1) At this time, which agency, department or entity has lead operational control of the coordinated response? As conditions fluctuate, will this operational control shift?
- 2) What is the current federal, state and local contribution of resources and assets to the response? What, if any, assets or resources are needed to respond to what we know is a far more difficult spill to cap and contain? Is there a plan to repurpose and utilize private vessels in the Gulf to enhance the cleanup effort?
- 3) With many of the response assets in the Gulf privately contracted, do our Coast Guard/Minerals Management Service (MMS) leaders have the authority to direct this response, without being hamstrung by financial obligation?

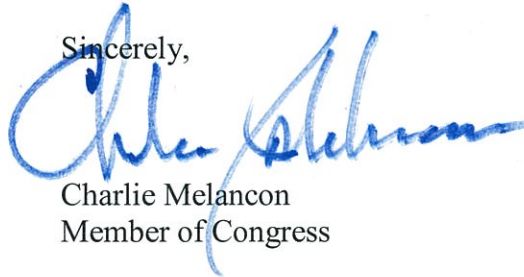
4) What legal responsibilities do the private companies involved have to respond, contain and clean up the spill? At this point, is BP Exploration and Production operating in good faith or out of a contractual or legal obligation?

5) What environmental impact concerns are currently driving the response? Does NOAA or the EPA have any input or authority to direct this response? Are reported plans to "in situ burn" the spill in the short and long term best interest of our coast?

Unlike the private entities charged with much of this disaster response, we are uniquely beholden only to the citizens we were elected to represent. I trust that we will not spare any expense to do what is right for the hundreds of thousands of Louisiana families that rely on our coastal industries for their livelihoods.

This letter is not intended to generate a penned response. I hope to speak to you both today and engage the Coast Guard and MMS leads coordinating the effort promptly. We all know that the disaster we are facing will not get any better without swift and robust action. As the representative of the people who will perhaps be most directly affected by this disaster, it is my duty to coordinate an honest dialogue between them and the entities working to clean up the oil slick. Your prompt response is appreciated.

Sincerely,



Charlie Melancon
Member of Congress